[22nd January 1964

[NOTE.—**An asterisk (*) at the commencement of a speech indicates revision by the Member.**]

II.—CALLING ATTENTION TO THE REPORTED DEATH OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN AT SIVAKASI CONSEQUENT ON THEIR PARTAKING OF FREE MIDDAY MEALS.

SRI M. RAJAH IYER : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I wish to call the attention of the Hon. the Chief Minister to a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the reported death of seven elementary school children on December 13th at Sivakasi consequent on their partaking of free midday meals supplied to them at school.

* THE HON. SRI R. VENKATARAMAN : Mr. Chairman, I beg to make the following statement for the consideration of the House :—

-40 There were reports in the press on 15th and 16th December
.m. 1963 that nine children studying in the Municipal Muslim Higher Elementary School, Sivakasi, died between 11th and 14th December 1963 after partaking of the midday meals served in the school. On 11th December 1963, rice, rasam prepared with multipurpose food and chutney were served. Milk was also served along with food. On 12th December 1963, corn-meal *uppuma* was served. No multipurpose food was used. Official reports were called for from the Director of Public Instruction and the Director of Public Health. The Collector of Ramanathapuram was also asked to personally investigate into the incident and send a report.

Fifty pupils were supplied with midday meals in the Municipal Muslim Higher Elementary School during the period from 11th December 1963 to 14th December 1963.

(At this stage the Hon. Minister stopped his speech as the Assembly Division bell was ringing powerfully in the lobby of the Council Chamber. After the bell stopped, he continued his speech.)

Mr. Chairman, I am sorry for the interruption. Twenty children were reported to be affected by alleged food poisoning after taking midday meals. Of these affected, one child of 2½ years of age started vomiting and purging at about 10 p.m. on 11th December 1963 and it died at 7 a.m. on 12th December 1963. It was given treatment at the Government Hospital. Motion and vomit culture could not be taken in this case. His elder sister had an attack of severe diarrohea a few days earlier and died. One other boy, who was not on the rolls of the school started vomiting and purging at about 4 p.m. on 12th December 1963 and he died at 8 p.m. on 13th December 1963 though he was treated in the Government Hospital. Thus the remaining 18 children out of the 20 affected were on the rolls of the school. Among them, two did not take the food or milk served in the school. Of those two, one started vomiting and purging on 13th December 1963 and the other on 14th December 1963. Both of them responded to treatment and recovered.

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Of the sixteen children who were midday meal beneficiaries, a boy, eight years old, started vomiting and purging at midnight on 11th December 1963. He was given treatment and he recovered. Two others started vomiting and purging at about 8 a.m. on 12th December 1963. They were also given treatment. One recovered and the other died. The remaining thirteen children had their midday meal in the school on 12th December 1963. Only three children took milk on that day and they were not among those affected. The time these children started vomiting and purging ranges between 4-45 p.m. on 12th December 1963 and the forenoon of 14th December 1963. Though all these thirteen children were given treatment, six died and the others recovered. Thus the total number of deaths was nine. Of these only seven were midday meal beneficiaries.

The motion culture of one of the victims was sent for examination and it was found to be positive to cholera. Unfortunately, in the remaining eight cases motion culture was not sent for examination. But samples of the uncooked food articles ravai (corn meal) milk powder, multipurpose food and hydrogenated vegetable oil were sent for examination at the King Institute, Guindy. The Government Analyst has reported that the articles were found to be free from chemical poisons. The place where the food was prepared and the utensils used for cooking were inspected by the officers and there was nothing wrong with them. The cook and the two pupils who regularly serve food were found to be free from skin diseases. The statistics for the months from August 1963 to December 1963 of the out-patient cases in the Government Hospital, Sivakasi, who were treated for stomach disorders revealed that there was an unusual spurt in the number of cases in December 1963 and some of them were found positive to cholera.

Taking all the facts into consideration, the Government have come to the conclusion that the deaths of the children were not due to food poisoning but were probably due to cholera.

After the food poisoning incident in the Basic Elementary School, Athipatti, in February 1963, the Government have issued instructions that strict hygienic standards should be observed in the preparation and service of meals and that the Public Health Staff should pay surprise inspection to the midday meal centres.

III.—DISCUSSION ON THE SECOND SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE FOR 1963-64.

SRI S. K. SAMBANDHAN : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I want to say a few words about the presentation of the Supplementary Estimates in this House. For the last three or four years the Supplementary Estimates used to be presented at this part of the year. This year the Hon. the Chief Minister who is in charge of Finance presented